

FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Gabriella Paterson-Griggs

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MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting of **FLETCHING PARISH COUNCIL** held on Thursday 8th May 2025 in the Village Hall, High Street, Fletching (7.30 – 8.30pm).

PRESENT: Councillors R Hannay (Chairman), D Greenish (Vice-Chairman), N Collum and D Woollven.

Also in attendance: Gabriella Paterson-Griggs (Clerk and RFO) and Councillor C Coleman (WDC).

Members of the Public in Attendance: 14

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Minch and Councillor Galley (ESCC)

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Councillor Richard Hannay welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the parish councillors and the clerk. The working groups and councillor responsibilities were reported to the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 9 MAY 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last annual parish meeting held on 9th May 2024 were a correct record and were duly signed by the Chairman.

3. REPORT FROM THE WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCILLOR CHRISTINA COLEMAN

Councillor Coleman gave an update on the work that Wealden District Council has been undertaking in the past year. She stated that there were only three years left for Wealden District Council as it would become extinct in 2028 under the proposed local government reorganisation.

She reported that the District Council had been focussing on making Wealden a place where People and Nature can thrive together and had achieved:

- A 20% reduction in carbon emissions in facilities directly controlled by the Council
- Securing Warm Homes Funding and improved the energy efficiency of over 1000 council owned homes
- Completion of 20 new energy efficient council homes with an A-rated EPC and delivered 777 new affordable homes
- Adoption of a revised council tax reduction scheme that offered 100% council tax reduction for 4000 eligible working age residents in Wealden
- Funding 12 Community Orchards within the District (securing £128k from the Coronation Heritage Fund)
- Support for the Wilder Ouse Project – a collaboration with Sussex Wildlife Trust, to create a nature recovery network and restore natural processes within the Ouse Catchment – by planting trees and hedgerows and restoring natural flow processes in the river.
- Refurbishment of the Hailsham and Uckfield Leisure Centres (saving Uckfield from proposed closure)
- Investment of £16m in the Wealden Sports Hub – a not for profit community benefit facility in Hailsham
- Purchase of land as the first stage of building a brand new £12m medical facility in Polegate
- Obtaining planning permission for a new medical centre and community facility in Mayfield
- Buying local where it can - £39m (40%) of Council procurement went to local companies over the last two years
- Reduction in fly tipping following the 'Have You Been Dumped' campaign
- Increased participation in recycling
- Extension of the use of hydro-treated vegetable oil (HVO) in the fleet of waste vehicles, reducing emissions by 90%
- Increased the provision of electrical charging points

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- Allocation of over £1m community grant funding to support partners deliver projects for Wealden residents
- Supporting over 100 good causes across the District through the Wealden Community Lottery by raising over £100k
- Better engagement with the public through the Let's Talk Wealden online hub

Cllr Coleman reported that a public consultation would be launched on Monday 12 May 2025 in respect of the proposed boundary of the new unitary authority for East Sussex. It was noted that the consultation would run for six weeks and that a final response would be received from the MHLCG in September. Concern was raised that under large administrative areas focus tends to be focussed on the urban settlements rather than the rural areas.

With regards to planning it was explained that a new planning application had been received for 1700 homes on land at Owlsbury Farm, Little Horsted that was the single largest planning application that Wealden had ever received. There was also an application for 250 houses at Goldbridge Farm, Newick that was with Lewes District Council (the site comes up to the Fletching parish border). In response to a question Cllr Coleman recommended that all those who objected to these applications should respond to the planning consultations on the applications.

She also updated on the appeal that had been found in Wealden's in respect of Grampian conditions on a development in Hailsham regarding sewerage and Southern Water and a High Court decision regarding Ancient Woodland.

With regards to the Local Plan it was noted that the government's housing targets had risen from 400 in 2013 to 1400 per year for the District which were considered to be damaging and unrealistic. In response to a question Cllr Coleman confirmed that information was relayed back to the government about the un-built permissions and the number of un-sold new properties was also acknowledged. With regards to the new estates it was suggested that the trees planted should have to be replaced if they die within 5 years of being planted and that it should be covered by condition so that it could be enforced.

Cllr Coleman reported that there were two new community funds coming in at Wealden – one being a Ward fund where each councillor would receive £10k to go towards projects in their ward and a Community Led Infrastructure Fund where £2m would be available for eligible projects between £5k and £200k. Further details would be announced by Wealden in the near future.

Cllr Hannay thanked Cllr Coleman for her report and for all her hard work in representing the parish.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman, Councillor Hannay, gave a presentation on the income and expenditure for the 2024/25 financial year. It was explained that the majority of the Parish Council's income was received from the precept. It was also reported that there was income received from the Burial Ground.

In respect of expenditure for the year it was stated that there had been a small underspend compared with the budget due to fewer grant applications being received and the Neighbourhood Plan project being funded from a Locality Grant. Grants were given to Wealden CAB and the Bonfire Society. Funding had also been given to Fletching Parochial Church Council. Community Infrastructure Levy funds had been spent on replacing the waste bins in Fletching village and a handrail by the village hall.

A breakdown of the income and expenditure was provided as well as information in respect of the Parish Reserves.

5. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST YEAR

Councillor Hannay gave the highlights of the past year as follows:

- Planning: a response had been submitted on the Local Plan regulation 18 consultation.
- Neighbourhood Plan – the Steering Group continued to work with consultants on producing the Neighbourhood Plan which had all been funded by a government grant.

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- Parish in Bloom: a second Gold Award achieved and Fletching was the Winning Parish for 2024
- The waste bins had all been replaced in the village to ones that fitted in with the street scene
- New handrail had been installed on the slope down from the car park to the village hall
- The kissing gate in the burial ground had been replaced

Planning Applications

Councillor Hannay explained that the vast majority of the applications were for extensions to existing properties, most of which were supported. However, the Parish Council continued to object to new build applications in Piltdown – the objections being supported by further appeal decisions. Councillor Hannay also thanked Hugh Bullock for the considerable support that he gives the parish in respect of planning matters.

6. PARISH OBJECTIVES 2024-25

The Parish objectives for 2025-26 were reported as:

- To get the Neighbourhood Plan past the Regulation 14 stage by:
 - Completing the current consultation by 31 May 2025
 - Completing the draft plan incorporating the responses to the consultation
 - Submitting the plan to Wealden for environmental and habitats regulation assessments
 - Carrying out the Regulation 14 consultation
- To robustly respond to the Owlsbury Farm and Goldbridge Farm planning applications
- To continue to engage actively on the development of the Local Plan
- To engage with Local Government Reform

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Village Hall – an update was requested on the Village Hall following the very sad death of the caretaker. Cllr Hannay explained that the Parish Council had been asked to consider becoming the sole trustee of the charity following the resignation of the trustees. It was noted that an informal meeting had been held prior to this meeting to discuss the way forward and to consider arrangements for the recruitment of a new caretaker. It was queried how much the village hall would be used now that there were other venues to hire within the village. Cllr Hannay that the view was that the various community spaces available in the village complemented each other and users could be signposted to the most appropriate venue. Concern was raised that if the village hall was used more frequently then the traffic issue within the High Street could return. With regards to any plans to build a new community hub on the outskirts of the village it was explained that any project would be dependent upon what alternative use the village hall could have, given that it is within the conservation area and surrounded by listed buildings, as the new building would need to be funded by disposal of the village hall.

Atheralls Farm – a plea was made for the farmhouse barn and oast at Atheralls Farm not to be included in the proposed Neighbourhood Plan as non-designated heritage assets (NHA). Cllr Hannay encouraged for this view to be put forward as part of the current consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan. Concern was raised that designating the buildings would lead to additional hoops to go through to get permission for them to be refurbished. It was explained that designating them as such should not make a difference when applying for permission, however, Cllr Coleman reported that at Wealden NHAs were given the same consideration as if they were listed which could make it more difficult. Cllr Hannay confirmed that the request would be passed to the Steering Group of which he was a member.

Burial Ground Path – whether there was any progress with extending the path from the church to the burial ground. It was explained that a quote had been received and others were being sought but that it would be an expensive project given the length of the path so it would need to be phased.

8. CLOSE OF MEETING

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Councillor Hannay also thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and closed the meeting at 8.30pm.